



GOROCKFORD

# QUARTERLY REPORT

**FY26, Q1**  
**July - September, 2025**

**GO**ROCKFORD  
Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau

The mission of GoRockford is to drive quality of life and economic growth for our citizens through tourism marketing and destination development.

[gorockford.com](http://gorockford.com)



# GoRockford Mission Statement

GoRockford drives quality of life and economic growth for our citizens through tourism marketing and destination development.

## PRIORITY RESULTS

### CREATE ECONOMIC WEALTH

The Rockford region experiences growth in tourism's leading indicators.

### ENHANCE TOURISM PRODUCT

The Rockford region offers unique and marketable experiences and venues that meet or exceed visitor expectations and enhance quality of life for citizens.

### ENGAGE CONSTITUENTS ON BEHALF OF TOURISM

GoRockford tourism marketing and destination development efforts have broad support among key stakeholders.

## A NOTE FROM THE PRESIDENT/CEO



As we begin FY26, the first quarter reinforced a simple truth: when we invest in place, people, and partnerships, the results follow. From July through September, **GoRockford** advanced destination development while delivering measurable economic impact for our region. This quarter blended community pride with national visibility and laid important groundwork for the year ahead.

Across Rockford, placemaking took center stage.

The installation of **18 new CRE8IV sculptures** and the relocation of the iconic **ROCKFORD letters** along the Rock River strengthened neighborhood identity, enhanced gateways, and created new moments of connection for residents and visitors alike. These visible investments reflect our belief that quality of place is fundamental to quality of life and to tourism growth.

Our sales and servicing efforts produced strong results. Sporting events, meetings, and conventions brought thousands of visitors to the region, resulting in more than **27,000 future hotel room nights** booked and an estimated **\$9 million in economic impact**. At the same time, Winnebago County continued to outperform regional benchmarks in occupancy, room demand, and visitor spending—clear indicators of a healthy and competitive destination.

This quarter also demonstrated the power of storytelling. National media coverage generated more than one billion impressions, spotlighting Rockford's affordability, amenities, and momentum. On our own platforms, GoRockford reached millions of users actively searching for things to do, places to explore, and reasons to visit—meeting audiences where curiosity turns into action.

Through **Made for Rockford**, we welcomed new residents, supported employers with talent recruitment, and strengthened connections that help people see Rockford not just as a destination—but as a place to belong.

Thank you to our partners, board, staff, and community champions who continue to move this work forward. FY26 is off to a strong start, and the momentum we are building together positions Rockford for continued growth, visibility, and impact.

Be well,

John Groh  
GoRockford President/CEO

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### GOROCKFORD NEWS

CRE8IV Sculptures.....	3
815 Day.....	3
Visitor Spending.....	3

### SALES EFFORTS & RESULTS

Sports Sales Highlights.....	4
Booking Highlights.....	4
Winnebago County Hotel Statistics.....	4

### MARKETING

Media Mentions & Placements.....	5
Earned Media.....	5
Social Media Analytics.....	5
Social Media Promotions.....	6
Internship.....	6
Website Statistics.....	6

### DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT

Forest City Beautiful.....	4
Santa's Workshop.....	4

### MADE FOR ROCKFORD

Quarterly Highlights.....	8
Mixer and Campaign.....	8

### GOROCKFORD BOARD & STAFF

GoRockford Board of Directors.....	9
GoRockford Staff.....	9

## SCULPTURE PROGRAM EXPANDS



A stunning new sculpture, "Neither Toil Nor Spin" by Ben Pierce features a stained glass center and sits on a bike path near Midway Village Museum.

GoRockford celebrates the expansion of its CRE8IV: transformational art sculpture program with the installation of **18 new sculptures** throughout the city and a new home for the beloved **ROCKFORD letters**. The new sculptures have been installed throughout Rockford, made possible thanks to an arts grant from the City of Rockford. In expanding the CRE8IV sculpture program, GoRockford made it a priority to install sculptures in additional neighborhoods across the community, including along West State Street, South Main Street, Perryville Road, Broadway, 7th Street, Harrison Avenue, the Edgewater neighborhood, and downtown Rockford. The donor-funded program has steadily grown to include 10 owned pieces and an additional five leased pieces, bringing the total number of pieces currently on display to **33 sculptures**. Five sculptures are part of a two-year lease and will be removed in 2026 and 2027.

"Thanks to the support from the City of Rockford's arts grant, we're not just adding more sculptures, we're adding public art to neighborhoods like never before," said **GoRockford's Executive Vice President Kristen Paul**. "These pieces invite community connection, spark joy, and reinforce Rockford's identity as a vibrant arts scene."

By situating sculptures in both historic corridors and emerging growth areas, the expansion not only beautifies high-traffic gateways and neighborhood centers but also reinforces Rockford's broader strategy to use public art as a driver of economic vitality, placemaking, and civic pride.

GoRockford worked with **Illinois Foodies (272K followers)** to promote the new sculptures. To view a sculpture map, visit [gorockford.com/sculptures](http://gorockford.com/sculptures).

## ROCKFORD 815 DAY CELEBRATES CIVIC PRIDE

This year's **Rockford 815 Day** celebration saw a record level of participation, featuring more than **20 events** and **126 deals and specials** across the community. The day

kicked off with a proclamation from Mayor Tom McNamara and the City of Rockford at the Rockford Public Library.

Many participants flocked to downtown Rockford for lunch, at the Beats & Bites block party event held near E. State and 1st Street. The block party capped off the 9-week Beats & Bites Thursday lunch initiative led by GoRockford and River District.

Visits to the GoRockford 815 Day pages on the website experienced record highs, with over **22,000 views** in August.



Rockford 815 Day attendees grab lunch at a local food trucks during the Beats & Bites block party located on E. State and 1st Street.

## ROCKFORD REGION REACHES RECORD VISITOR SPENDING

Tourism is a powerful economic driver in the Rockford region, contributing to job creation in the hospitality industry and economic growth. In 2024, visitor spending in our region hit **\$523.4 million**, up from **\$515.4 million** in 2023, and an increase over the prior year, when some counties in Illinois experienced a decline. See sidebar for what that means for Winnebago County.

The tourism and economic impact information is part of a comprehensive annual report released by the Illinois Department of Commerce & Economic Opportunity and compiled by Tourism Economics. Regionally, Winnebago County also outperformed its Northwest Illinois neighbors, which collectively averaged a -0.68% decline in spending in 2024.

Looking ahead, GoRockford is confident this momentum will continue with major events and developments on the horizon, including IRONMAN 70.3 Rockford, the 2026 AHL All-Star Classic, the 2024 opening of the Hard Rock Rockford, and new projects emerging from the **Thrive 2035 Destination Master Plan**.

### Tourism Spending Winnebago County 2024

- 💰 4,687 local jobs supported by tourism
- 💰 \$167.8 million in income generated for residents
- 💰 \$14.7 million in local taxes

# SALES EFFORTS & RESULTS

## SPORTS AND MEETING SALES HIGHLIGHTS



A player hits a softball at NAFA Men's Masters World Series.

### JEHOVAH'S WITNESS CONVENTION EXPANDS

The summer kicked off in July as Rockford welcomed the Jehovah's Witness Convention, which spanned two weekends and filled the seats at the **BMO Center** in downtown Rockford. The event attracted more than 5,000 attendees per weekend from across the Midwest, including both English- and Spanish-speaking delegates, providing a significant boost to area hotels, restaurants, and attractions with an estimated economic impact of **\$3.6 million**.

### BORDER BATTLE DEBUTS

The Wisconsin Off Road Series (WORS) Border Battle, a two-day mountain biking competition debuted at **Atwood Trails** on **July 19-21** for the first time in Illinois. The race drew riders from both Illinois and Wisconsin, highlighting Rockford's reputation for outdoor adventure and trail-based recreation weekend included **308 teams** and over **7,000 attendees** and an estimated economic impact of **\$129,285**.

### TOUGH MUDDER REACHES MILESTONE

In August, the region celebrated the **10th anniversary of Tough Mudder**, one of the largest events of its kind in the nation. Participants from across the country traveled to take on either the 5K or 15K course, featuring more than 30 obstacles. This long-standing draws **10,000 athletes and spectators** each year, and an estimated economic impact of **\$527,572**.

### NAFA BRINGS IMPACT

Rounding out the quarter in September, Rockford hosted the **North American Fastpitch Association (NAFA) Men's Masters World Series East** from **September 5-7** at **Mercyhealth Sportscore One**. The tournament brought in over 1,000 players, coaches, and spectators, with 40 teams competing throughout the weekend, bringing in an estimated economic impact of **\$550,540**.

### TRADESHOW HIGHLIGHTS

The GoRockford sales team represented Rockford at the **Connect Marketplace Sports Trade Show** in Miami, Florida from **August 24-26**. During the show, they met with more than **25 tournament directors** to discuss bringing future events to Rockford. This tradeshow provided valuable opportunities to connect with new organizers while strengthening relationships with current and past tournament directors which reinforces Rockford's visibility and reputation within the national sports tourism industry.

## BOOKING HIGHLIGHTS

- Baseball for All**  
 July 19- 24, 2026  
 3,000 Room nights  
 Estimated Economic Impact \$1.5 Million
- NXT PRO Boys and Girls Basketball**  
 March & May 2026  
 2000 room nights  
 Estimated Economic Impact \$1.1 Million
- Midwest Women's Riders**  
 July 11, 2026  
 1000 room nights  
 Estimated Economic Impact \$936,000
- Lady Bass Anglers**  
 September 10, 2026  
 300 room nights  
 Estimated Economic Impact \$143,982

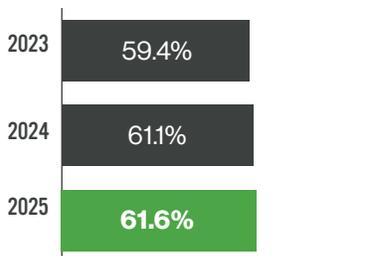
**Future Hotel Room Nights Booked During the Quarter: 27,350 with an economic impact of \$9 Million**  
**Number of Bookings: 16**



Part of the GoRockford sales team Lindsay Arellano and Kara Davis attend Connect Marketplace Sports Trade Show in August.

## WINNEBAGO COUNTY HOTEL STATISTICS Jan - September, 2025

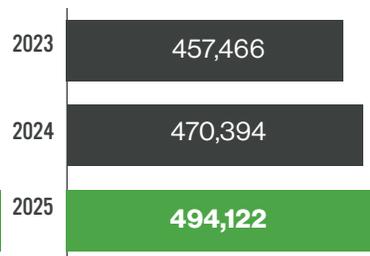
### Year to Date Hotel Occupancy



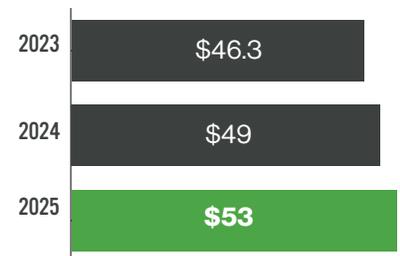
### Year to Date Average Room Rate



### Year to Date Room Demand (rooms sold)



### Year to Date Revenue (in millions)



# MARKETING

## MEDIA MENTIONS & PLACEMENTS

GoRockford garners media mentions and placements to draw visitors to the Rockford region. Collaborating with regional and national media outlets, our team diligently seeks and shares captivating stories and compelling content centered experiences in Rockford, visiting the region and destination development.

### NATIONAL MEDIA MENTIONS

**Homes.com:** *“Once called ‘miserable,’ Rockford, Illinois, is attracting new homebuyers”*(07/07/2025) 25,500,000 impressions and 943,500 Earned Media

**Business Insider:** *“They fled cities in the pandemic exodus, seeking a cheaper cost of living, safety, and more. Here’s how it’s panned out.”* (08/16/2025) 37,800,000 Impressions and \$1,398,600 Earned Media

**HGTV:** *“The Most Beautiful Garden You Can Visit in Every State.”* (08/25/2025) 3,700,000 impressions and \$136,900 Earned Media

**Forth-Worth Star Telegram:** *“Historic ballpark home to ‘A League of Their Own’ team getting \$2M upgrade”*(09/10/2025) 1,300,000 Impressions and \$48,100 Earned Media

They fled cities in the pandemic exodus, seeking a cheaper cost of living, safety, and more. Here’s how it’s panned out.



In an August Business Insider article, Andrew Blevins, an insurance agent in Rockford speaks on why he and his wife moved from New York City to Rockford in 2020.

## SOCIAL MEDIA



### FACEBOOK

4.3 Million Views  
52,297 Followers



### INSTAGRAM

1.1 Million Views  
24,007 Followers



### LINKEDIN

3,000 Followers



### TikTok

705K Post Views  
8,063 Followers

### Top Facebook Post

August 3, 2025 | Impressions 510,397



Everything we ate at @thefoodparkloves New food truck oasis offering delicious beverages,...

Go Rockford · Original audio

6,237  
775  
1,155



## EARNED MEDIA (July - September, 2025)

GoRockford works to attract visitors by directly pitching stories to media. Pitches are focused on economic development, tourism marketing and travel public relations.



**\$17,000,000**  
Ad equivalency



**1,070,000,000**  
Total impressions



**1,060**  
Number of mentions

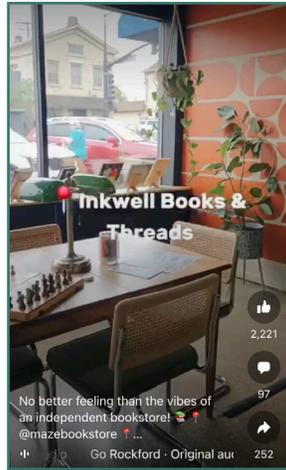
# MARKETING

## SOCIAL MEDIA PROMOTIONS

Each month of the quarter had a different focus, leading to impressive engagement.

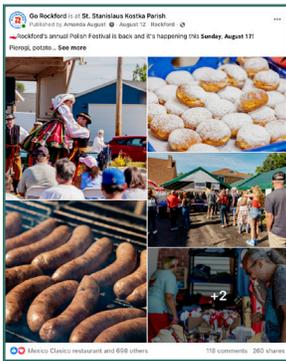
### JULY

Leading up to the 4th of July, locals look to GoRockford for the major events happening. July's promotions also included promoting summer activities such as wakeboarding, summer festivals, Hurricane Harbor and enjoying the outdoors. July's efforts reached over **1.4 million views** between Facebook and Instagram.



### AUGUST

**Rockford 815 Day** was the main focus of August, however smaller efforts were promoting the major festivals and events of the month, including the Winnebago County Fair. Also in August, the marketing team worked several posts about the new CRE8IV sculptures in Rockford. The efforts paid off, with close to **2 million views** on Facebook and Instagram. The top post for August was visiting the new **Food Truck Park** in Loves Park, and they reported an increase in sales.



### SEPTEMBER

Starting in August, but really taking off in September was promoting fall fun in Rockford. Apple orchards, where to view leaves, fall festivals and more made it a September to remember. New business opening reels were popular, with GoRockford being on hand for the opening of **Clarence Hicks Sports Complex, Olivo Deli Market and The Picking Chicks**. September's views were **1.9 million** between Facebook and Instagram.

## SUMMER INTERNSHIP PROGRAM AND COMMUNITY OUTREACH

### Summer Internship

GoRockford offered a summer internship to three interns over the summer. All three are studying marketing, but they learned from all departments. Our interns worked hard helping set up the Beats & Bites Thursday lunch, helping with IRONMAN 70.3 Rockford preparations, including community outreach and working at the GoRockford booth during the event.



They each wrote three blogs about their experiences in Rockford, and they worked on group projects such as creating social media reels. Their final project challenged them to present in front of the staff their ideas for the future of Rockford and new fresh ideas on how to market, placemaking, and more.

### Community Outreach

During this quarter, the team hosted a marketing partnership meeting with local attractions at **Victory Pickleball**. The topic of September's meeting was a media roundtable and members of the media presented their best tips to gain valuable media coverage.



In August, **Fiesta Hispana** returned this past August from an 18 years hiatus. The festivities included a jalapeño eating contest, horse dancing and a queen competition. Local artists shared Latino heritage and the culture of Spanish-speaking countries with the community. GoRockford had the privilege of hosting a table at this event and witnessed a cherished tradition start again in Rockford for hopefully many more years to come.

### MOST SEARCHED TERMS

- Rockford Events This Weekend
- Things to Do In Rockford, IL
- Restaurants in Rockford, IL

### MOST SEARCHED EVENTS

- Polish Fest
- Rockford Day
- Tour De North End

### MOST SEARCHED LISTINGS

- Anderson Japanese Gardens
- Food Truck Park
- Olson Lake Beach

## Website Traffic Sources



# DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT

## NEW ART BRIGHTENS THE COMMUNITY



Newly installed "Astron" adds a pop of color to West State St. in Rockford.

The main focus of Destination Development this summer adding new art to Rockford with the CRE8IV Sculpture program. In July, Executive Vice President Kristen Paul led a mural tour for a bus group coming from Evanston, Illinois, discussing how CRE8IV murals transformed the community.

Coinciding with the installation of the new sculptures, the iconic **ROCKFORD LETTERS** were repaired and moved to their new home next to the Rock River, close to the Rockford Public Library. The new home of the letters and spacing them closer together, provides an scenic backdrop for photos.

## STROLL ON STATE PREPARATIONS BEGIN

In July, to promote **Stroll on State**, GoRockford celebrating **Christmas in July with Anderson Japanese Garden's** summer reading program. The Garden Explorers program offers families free admission to the gardens. GoRockford provided a Christmas craft for families.

In September, the Stroll on State Santa's Workshop opened for the season on Tuesday evenings and Saturday mornings. The 11-week program helps prepare for Stroll on State, with volunteers painting, building, and so much more. Thousands of volunteer hours go into this program to prepare for the largest community festival of the year. Volunteers continue into January for Back-In-Box weekend to take down the decorations put up for the season.



From left: "Liquid Sunshine", top right: "Crystalline", bottom right: a family dresses in their holiday attire for the Christmas in July Garden Explorers at Anderson Japanese Gardens.

## CRE8IV SCULPTURES

In August 18 new sculptures in the CRE8IV program were added to the following areas and neighborhoods:

### WEST STATE STREET

"Sunstruck" by Nicole Beck

"Window" by Paul Bobrowitz

"Astron" by Peter Krsko and Nathan

Nathan "Sloke One" Nordstrom

"Skyward" by Ben Pierce

### DOWNTOWN

"Florette II" by Sam Spiczka

"Crystalline" by Ben Pierce

### HARRISON AVENUE

"Reach" by Ben Pierce

"Flux" by Luke Achterberg

### BROADWAY & 7TH Street

"Triangle Play II" by Sunghee Min

"Here Comes the Sun" by Ben Pierce

"Greeting Tower" by Sunghee Min

### NORTH END

"Cardinal" by Zan Knecht

"Unsure if this Peace is Abstract" by Ben

Pierce

### PERRYVILLE ROAD

"Neither Toil, Nor Spin" by Ben Pierce

"Composition #1" by Chris Plaisted

"Liquid Sunshine" by Michael Alfano

### SOUTH MAIN STREET

"Thank You Degas" by Terry Karpowicz

"Phoenix" by Chris Plaisted

# MADE FOR ROCKFORD

## MADE FOR ROCKFORD IMPACT AWARD



Roger Raley receives the Made For Rockford Impact Award in September 2025.

Made for Rockford presented its first **Made for Rockford Impact Award** in partnership with the **Greater Rockford Chamber of Commerce**, recognizing new resident and business owner, **Roger Raley**, Vice President and General Manager Waldom Electronics who has made a significant difference in the community since relocating by joining non profit boards and working to provide more housing options to the downtown area.

## MARKETING AND AWARENESS CAMPAIGN

Made for Rockford partnered with a Madden Media to launch a targeted campaign promoting Rockford's cost-of-living advantage to the Chicago market. The effort included digital ads across major platforms, placements on bar and venue screens, digital billboards, and a Rockford radio campaign that aired more than **480,000 times**.

## TALENT WARS PODCAST

Made for Rockford Director Whitney Martin was featured on Development Counsellors International's "**Talent Wars**" Podcast, highlighting the program as a national example of how relationship-building drives talent retention and community engagement.

## LETTERS OF ENCOURAGEMENT

The **Made for Rockford 'Go Team** collaborated with **Rockford Promise** to send handwritten postcards to local students studying away from home, offering encouragement ahead of midterms. The initiative provides one of many personal touchpoint for scholars and a reminder that their hometown community is cheering them on year-round.

## NEW RESIDENT MIXER

Made for Rockford hosted its third New Resident Mixer in July in partnership with **Anderson Japanese Gardens**. The event drew our largest crowd yet, with more than **70 new residents** in attendance, plus community members and Mayor Tom McNamara, who officially welcomed people to the city. The event fosters meaningful connections and a strong sense of belonging while highlighting area attractions.



New residents pose at the Made for Rockford backdrop during the July 2025 New Resident Mixer.

## COMMUNITY TOURS

Made for Rockford continued its strong partnership with major employers, providing over **30 customized community tours** for job applicants throughout the quarter. These tailored tours highlight Rockford's unique neighborhoods, attractions, and quality of life, helping candidates see why Winnebago County is the ideal place to live, work, and play.

## INFLUENCER PARTNERSHIPS

During this quarter, a partnership between Made for Rockford, GoRockford and the Greater Rockford Chamber of Commerce with DCI led to two notable influencer visits.

**Nicole Pang (428,000 followers)** visited in August and created two reels. Her first reel at Gretta's Goats had **51,000 in views** and **3,169 interactions**. Her second reel highlighted a weekend trip in Rockford and review **189,000 views** and **19,638 interactions**.

**Expedition Kristen (142,000 followers)**, visited in September to promote some fall activities in the region. Her video had **22,817 views** and **897 interactions**, and she wrote a blog of her experience.

# GoROCKFORD BOARD & STAFF

## GoRockford Board of Directors

**Geno Iafrate (Chair)**  
Hard Rock Rockford

**Tiana McCall (Vice Chair)**

**Mick Gronewold (Treasurer)**  
Fehr Graham Engineering  
& Environmental

**Dana Martin (Secretary)**  
Rosecrance Behavioral Health

**Carol Schuster**  
University of Illinois  
College of Medicine - Rockford

**Jennifer Furst**  
Furst Staffing

**Shelton Kay**  
Rockford Regional Health Council

**Richard Shuga**  
Painters District Council  
No. 30 Local 607

**Todd Cagnoni**  
City of Rockford

**Gretchen Gilmore**  
Rockford Area Venues &  
Entertainment Authority (R.A.V.E.)

**Angela Larson**  
Greater Rockford Chamber of  
Commerce

**Chintan Thakkar**  
Decorum Management Group

**Mark Henderson**  
Village of Rockton

**Bobbie Holzwarth**  
HolmstromKennedy

**Ricardo Montoya-Picazo**  
Office of State  
Representative Dave Vella

**Patrick Thompson**  
Winnebago County

**Duncan Geddes**  
City of Loves Park

**Sonya Hoppes**  
City of South Beloit

**Jay Sandine**  
Rockford Park District

**Kirk Weitzel**  
Rock Hospitality

**Ald. Kevin Frost**  
City of Rockford

## GoRockford Foundation Board of Directors

**Carol Schuster (Foundation Chair)**  
University of Illinois College of Medicine  
Rockford

**Geno Iafrate (Vice Chair)**  
Hard Rock Rockford

**Marco Lenis  
(Foundation Treasurer)**  
Vocational Rehabilitation Management

**Gina Caruana  
(Foundation Secretary)**  
Foresight Financial Group

**David Anderson**  
Anderson Japanese Gardens

**Jennifer Furst**  
Furst Staffing

**Jeff Marrs**  
Morgan Stanley

**Leslie West**  
State Farm

**Rebecca Francis**  
Ignite Change Solutions LLC

**Theresa Kegley**  
Movement Fitness

**Jim Pirages**  
AGHL Law

**Alexis Wright-Conniff**  
Woodward

## GoRockford Staff



**John Groh**  
President, CEO



**Kristen Paul**  
Executive Vice  
President



**Lindsay Arellano**  
Vice President of Sales &  
Service



**Joanne Nold**  
Vice President of  
Finance



**Amanda August**  
Social Media and  
Communications Specialist



**Chenaire Barmore**  
Communications Manager



**Miranda Brook**  
Customer Experience  
Coordinator



**Kara Davis**  
Senior Sales Manager



**Elizabeth Falls**  
Marketing Manager



**Julie Huber**  
Destination Development  
Operations Manager



**Whitney Martin**  
Made for Rockford  
Program Director



**Emily Plumb**  
Sales & Servicing  
Manager



**Leah Ticknor**  
Office Manager &  
Executive Assistant